

Supplement to the Poison Cone Shell¹

By WILLIAM J. CLENCH

The following appeared anonymously in a newspaper under the title of "Natural History." I am indebted to Dr. D. F. McMichael of the Australian Museum, for bringing it to my attention.

The Sidney Mail, January 10, 1874, p. 50.

"A strange instance of poisoning occurred on the Island of Maré [Loyalty Islands, New Caledonia]. On a Monday morning the *John Williams* anchored off the station of the Rev. J. Jones. For a long time no notice was taken of our visit, not a canoe came off. When at last the missionary pulled off to us in his boat, we anxiously inquired the cause of delay.

"Mr. Jones had been burying a poor man who had been poisoned by handling a fish. After attending the services of the Sabbath, the thoughtless fellow went fishing on the reef at sunset. In the doubtful light he unhappily took up a good sized shell-fish and put it in his basket. He immediately felt a painful sensation running up his right arm to the shoulder. He went home. The pain increased until he writhed in agony. The body swelled to an enormous size and by daylight he was a corpse. So remarkable did this seem to me that I requested a sight of the shell-fish which poisons by the mere touch, although the skin be uninjured. The request was kindly complied with by the friends of the deceased; and the shell proved to be the *Conus textile*.

"This variety of shell-fish is well known to the natives of Western Polynesia for its dangerous qualities. A virulent poison is injected by means of numerous minute barbs connected with the mantle. These barbs somewhat resemble the sting of a bee."

¹ See *Occasional Papers On Mollusks*, 1946, 1: 49-80.